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ABSTRACT

This paper starts with assumptions about the contested nature of teacher training and supports the view that learning about teaching is a dialogical process facilitated by social interaction. The development of "reflective intervention" gives prominence to narrative modes of cognition as tutors and students identify private "theories" and reconstruct experiences and attempt to link these to public theories. Such reconstructions can reveal unexplored aspects of the person when faced with conflict and stress. Experience with teachers' narratives suggests the need for a careful plan in which the accounts of school experiences are positioned within a supportive structure. Issues relating to tutors' skills in "reading" student accounts are considered and a plea is made for reflective space in crowded training programs. (Author/IAH)

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'Teachers as unexplored persons;pre-service teachers' narratives, diaries and field notes'

Abstract

This paper starts with assumptions about the contested nature of teacher training and supports the view that learning about teaching is a dialogical process facilitated by social interaction. The development of 'reflective intervention' gives prominence to narrative modes of cognition as tutors and students identify private 'theories' and reconstruct experiences and attempt to link these to public theories. Such reconstructions can reveal unexplored aspects of the person when faced with conflict and stress. Experience with teachers' narratives suggests the need for a careful plan in which the accounts of school experiences are positioned within a supportive structure. Issues relating to tutors' skills in 'reading' student accounts will be considered as well as making a plea for reflective space in crowded training programmes.

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TEACHERS' NARRATIVES -DIARIES AND FIELD NOTES;THE INTERSECTION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THEORIES.

1 ESTABLISHING SOME PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

I shall start by trying to acknowledge some personal positions as a scaffold on which to hang ideas about the place and problems of teachers' narratives, diaries and notebooks with a special concern for the pre-service teacher.

2 EDUCATION AND TRAINING; CONTESTED AREAS

2.1 Education

It is claimed, and I do, that the actions and intentions of the UK Government, since 1987, has been in the direction of attempting to remove from debates on education, and in its practice, any serious notion of it being a contested area, except on technical matters of delivery and modes and methods of assessment. Those issues of aims, objectives, purposes in complex pluralistic society which are matters of partisan debate have been pushed to one side in favour of a monolithic view of education; the so-called consensus which is supposed to permeate all sections of the professional educational community. Those holding discrepant and despised views are labelled 'the educational establishment'

2.2 Teacher training

Similarly we can see clearly emerging a monocular view of teaching, teachers and teacher training which favours the rationalist-technicist model. The ideological thrust towards emphasising 'teacher as curriculum deliverer', the importance being given to the bureaucratic aspects of teacher assessment of pupils, the value -added element being given to school-based training models and the orchestrated attack on training institutions as peddlers of unwanted, unnecessary, irrelevant and damaging 'theories' are part of this process. These stem, from a certain political orientation and in part, from a genuine, if mistaken belief in, or ignorance about teaching and learning, which asserts a lean, limited, and I my view, ultimately, impoverished vision of teaching and teachers. [pace O'Hear, 1989]

2.3 The ambiguous text

Before considering my main theme I need to offer my own ideological perspective - as far as one can ever be aware of such perspectives since they are by definition nearly invisible; 'every fact is someone else's ideology.' I am uncomfortable with the traditional prescription that education and training is 'the transmission of knowledge and values by those who knew more to those who knew less and less expertly.' [Bruner,1986:123] Teacher training ought, at least at some point, and I believe quite centrally, should take as a sound working principle that

it is in a contested area and the transmission of 'the teaching culture' should be regarded as equivalent to reading an 'ambiguous text'. The preparation of the novice teacher should be appreciated as having the character of or be conducted in the spirit of a forum- where every free man and woman and child is entitled to speak and be given a hearing. It should have as part of its processes both the possibility of negotiation and the recreation of meanings. [Calderhead,1990] Taking this view increases the difficulty of the task for both parties.

3 POSITIONS ON LEARNING, COGNITION AND LANGUAGE

3.1 About learning

Further, as to the andragogical aspects of teacher training, I hold that effective learning is facilitated by socially shared activities. The contribution of Vygotsky [see Wertsch, J.V. [ed.] Culture, Communication and Cognition:Vygotskian Perspectives [1985] Cambridge University Press] to the understanding of social learning has, perhaps been more fully appreciated in respect of children than adults, nevertheless it contains many significant insights. Further, teachers in training [and their tutors] should strive to develop 'reflective intervention' in the knowledge they encounter and impart. Without this constant attempt to interact with given, propositional knowledge, the learner will remain controlled, driven or guided by 'outside' knowledge rather than 'inside' knowledge which had become incorporated/ assimilated/absorbed,

by experience and reflection.

3.2 Logico-scientific mode and the narrative mode

I have taken, as an important 'fact' [or ideology] that there is a binary mode of cognition in which the logico-scientific mode is supported by a narrative one which is of equivalent value. The former is concerned with hypotheses testing and the latter hypotheses creation. The narrative mode is ideally suited to the exploration of relationships, causes, motives, feelings and consequences. Those who know Bruner's Actual Minds: Possible Worlds [Harvard University Press, 1986] will recognize the source of these ideas now translated into the world of the pre-service teacher.

3.3 Language and labels

One major underlying assumption is that our ways of naming and describing the world shapes and limits the lives we can live. Our ways of naming are, by an large, provided for us and we share these ways with others socialised in similar circumstances. The word 'teach' derives from OE taecan and is the same root as tacen from which we have our word 'token' or 'sign'. It means 'to point in a particular direction' to 'impart knowledge of a subject' and 'to communicate something to a person by way of instruction.' [It also contains the idea of a threat, of costs and penalties as in "I'll teach you a lesson you won't forget."] With its etymology we are reminded that teaching as bearing or

sign [token] thus carries the implication of there being more than one direction and that signs [signposts?] can mislead . Umberto Eco noted, 'a sign is that which has the capacity to lie.' The unidirectional transmission model contains the possibility that it is capable of misleading by ignoring other routes and journeys.

I subscribe to the view that an important part of teacher training is to engage, dialogically, with the notion that the 'knowledge of the subject' [teaching] is in itself a problematic one, 'an ambiguous text' which requires in its exegesis more than one translator and a scepticism about any 'authorized version.'

4 REQUIREMENTS FOR A DIALOGICAL-REFLECTIVE SPACE

It would follow from the above, that pre-service teachers need an exposure to dialogical-reflective practice so that, in Brunerian terms, there can be a better match between the systems in the training environment which support learning and the processes by which the learners are acquiring their knowledge. Part of the exposure to reflective practice is the generation of personal-professional narratives and the keeping of journals and logs.

5 PERSONAL-PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

There will be no argument that teacher -training is concerned

with 'professional' growth, although there will be a variety of opinions about content and approaches. There would appear to be equivalently strong support for the concept of 'personal development' during initial training from some educators, however time, space and resources for this aspects are threaten by the encroachments of the former;the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education requirements for course approval marginalises the opportunities for personal growth and development. Real changes occur when there is an interaction between the personal and the professional as 'outside' knowledge becomes personally reconstructed as 'inside' knowledge [Carr, 1989] Forms of domination implicit in unreflective practice can be uncovered leading to individual empowerment and release from the cage of unexamined teacher ideologies [Smyth,1987]

6 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THEORIES;TENSIONS AND RECONSTRUCTION

6.1 Teachers and tutors reflect together

One of the reasons I work with teachers using the narrative mode of cognition is that both autobiographical accounts [of their experiences as pupils and as teachers] and logs/journals allow the possibility of social learning. [Thomas, 1991] The sharing of experiences permits the construction of a range of understandings and interpretations from which some reconstruction of professional value may emerge - not final, always provisional and subject to review. [Connelly and Clandinin, 1990] Its model is the hermeneutical spiral. But we must be aware that our ways

of naming the world may not be shared by those we teach or by those who provide powerful models of teaching in action. Students, education tutors and school based supervisors operate with a range of implicit and explicit theories as well as a range of private and public theories. Dialogical reflection provides the milieu in which these range of theories may emerge, reviewed or challenged.

6.2 Teachers as unexplored people; the 'I'-search

In entering into negotiations with teachers the distinction between 'professional' and 'personal' is often less than clear. Among the aspects of tutor-student relationship is the handling of the personal interface of professional issues. Dialogical relationships of this kind often reveals psychological issues which the pre-service teacher has not resolved. Among those which I have encountered are a] an unwillingness to <u>define</u> oneself as a <u>teacher</u> while being committed to becoming one. Others include unresolved feelings about <u>authority</u> and its uses and abuses. Curiosities emerge as in the case of the student who privately held that pupil behaviours are largely affected by astrological factors; one who held that public theories about motivation and learning colloquially expressed as 'learning can be fun' are deeply objectional and trivial.

Training institutions profoundly concerned with multi-cultural or equal opportunities issues need to be sensitive to the emotional luggage which students carry with them on entry and

which is not always 'unpacked' in seminar rooms or lecture halls- some baggage may even be labelled 'not wanted on this voyage'. Students bring a range of personally held beliefs about child development, learning and teaching. Encounters with children in school and class, relationships with school staff and handling criticisms can unearth deep rooted emotions and unresolved personal issues and conflicts and this is where personal journals can provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. It is the site where personal knowing confronts propositional knowledge; the public and the private theories have a chance to manifest themselves in a 'safe[r]' environment.

6.3 Situating discourse in actual context

One of the cardinal sins of education is the painless decontextualised generalization [this generalization is, of course, another one of them]. One of the great astringent virtues of dialogical relationships focused on journals or diaries is that the discourse is situated in the concrete. Events, relationships and practice are described in particular discrete contexts: honouring spontaneity, specificity and ambiguity. The events described, the stories told, the linking of cause and effect, the attempts to uncover previously unexamined assumptions, involves the integration of knowledge and feelings, experience, reflection and analysis. As such, accounts which are derived from the actualities of real relationships and events can provide a searching examination of public theories. Sanitized propositional knowledge propounded in lecture rooms has

to stand the test of scrutiny from an a-theoretic and untidy world. When pre-service teachers begin to challenge public theories through their own experiences we can sense in them genuine intellectual and professional growth.

One of the strengths of this way of working its legitimation of the whole person; there is no, academic, obligation to present a depersonalised 'objective' account, and the story teller offers him/herself as a complete person with a history and a sense of agency occupying a particular place at a particular time. In place of clinical objectivity what is required, initially, is an intention towards truthfulness and wholeness, as these are perceived by the narrator. [Grumet, 1987]

7 DEVELOPING INSTANT DEFENSIBLE REPERTOIRES

7.1 Action, choice and defensible decisions

One of the distinctive colouring of teaching is that it is, par excellence, a profession where there is a premium on <u>action</u> and activity. It requires, on many occasions, instant, on-the-spot reactions and responses to situations, events and persons. The latency period is often infinitesimal; reflection before action a rare luxury. The concept of 'knowing in action' and 'knowing in reflection' draws attention to the resources available to a teacher in the moments of action. Particularly for the novice teacher the 'knowing in action' is <u>as</u> likely to draw upon

personal knowledge [private theories] as upon newly imparted propositional knowledge [public theories] which, by definition must be de-contextualized. The purpose of reciprocal and interactive reflection upon journal accounts is to strengthen and enlarge the reservoir of available repertoires for immediate responses which produce defensible decisions [those which can be defended and supported in the light of ethical principles] in respect of learning and learners. It is to reduce and to make them more difficult of access those spontaneous responses which derive from un-explored personal dilemmas and unexamined private theories which can result in 'indefensible' responses.

8 TEACHERS' PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

8.1 From the work of researchers such as Clandinin [1989] we have learned to understand that novice teachers as well a experienced ones, bring to the task of teaching personal and practical knowledge of a non-propositional character which is largely experiential in origins with strong emotional and moral dimensions. These are the things which pre-service teachers know, believe and will defend with vigour. This might be called 'practical knowledge' and it is not formulaic, not taught but is acquired through experience and consequently more potent and more readily available than taught propositions. Training is about reflecting on one's practical knowledge.

8.2 Experience; educative and miseducative

This line of thinking will at some point direct us to consider that we understand by and the values we attach to 'experience'. This is too great a subject to enter into here but this is not to belittle its significance. [Dewey, 1938; Winter, 1989] Not all experience is 'educative'; for Dewey, educative experiences are those which produce personal growth as they obtain constructive meanings from them. Miseducational experiences are those which are detrimental and inhibit further learning and produce irrational or irrelevant responses.

8.2.1 Experiences; concrete and vicarious

Before considering how we can respond to students notebooks and diaries it is important to recognise that such writing and reflection required can represent a novel and challenging experience for some students.

I have found the use of accounts of the working practices of teachers by written by teachers a useful way of introducing students to the interaction of private and public theories. Accounts by Trumbull [1990] -the evolution of one teacher's constructivist view of teaching, Cambone [1990] - a teacher of emotionally disturbed pupils describes her struggle to "tip the balance in favour of the children" -and Stumbo [1989] who describes how doing an oral history project with her pupils had a far reaching effect upon her views of her own education, teaching, her students and the community they came from, are examples of the kinds of texts which offer helpful exemplars to

beginning teachers. It is not good practice, in my view, to hold up for emulation, the best personal file produced from last years' crop of students.

8.3 Failures as well as successes?

Knowles [1989] provides an intriguing account of one pre service teacher's attempts to qualify. Her notebooks, extracts from which appear in Knowles' paper, provide plenty of raw material to stimulate discussion

> I found out quickly that teaching wasn't what I'd thought it would be. Instead of being able to enjoy presenting an interesting lesson, I was sidetracked by administrative details, disruptive students, and a general unwillingness on the part of students to take the class seriously. [p17]

In this one short extract we may find the germs of a set of personal pedagogic theories. We have an indication of anticipation ['what I'd thought it to be'], personal motivation ['enjoy presenting'], projection [unwilling students] and moral aspects [not taking lessons seriously] which are sufficient to engage pre-service teachers in beginning to 'unpack' some of their own intellectual and professional baggage, or at least to start understanding how this process might start.

She has problems [as seen by her tutor] as the complexities of the task overwhelm her, difficulties in making her presence felt in the class, physical exhaustion and demoralization. This example is valuable since it provides a contrast between the pre-service teacher's views and expectations for what she would get from teaching with her actual experiences. It is also an example which illustrates the problems and possibilities in the tutor role. It allows student teachers to reflect on what their expectations are for the supervisor role.

9 DESPATCHES

Student note books are like despatches. Written under stress and often in a state of fatigue by people who are at their most vulnerable, while simultaneously coping with a novel form. Anxiety is likely to be high especially as teaching practice appears to be an event the outcomes from which, one is unable to predict with reasonable accuracy. Such accounts require sensitive responses and ideally need to be placed in a supportive context.

10 EXPERIENTIAL MODEL

As education tutors we need to place our students' narratives within a supportive conceptual framework which matches the intentions for the work, the commitment required of the students and skill and resources required for genuine dialogical

relationships.

Knowles suggests a process model which has the following elements

10.1 Focus; where the student prepares herself for teaching and attempts to get the tasks 'in focus'

10.2 Challenging action;where ideas, ideals, expectations about teaching come into contact with actualities, but these should not be wildly discrepant with the kinds of preparations on-going in 10.1

10.3 Support and feed-back: to most students this comes from their school based supervisor, college tutor and peer groups.

10.4 De-briefing: reflection on the 'challenging action' part of the cycle.

11 WORKING WITH STUDENTS

11.1 Using reflective journals during the 'challenging action','feed-back' and 'de-briefing' phases would appear to have at least two major advantages

11.1.1 a] monitoring individual students responses to their situation

11.1.2 b] providing institutional feed-back on the relationship between the 'focus' and ' challenging actions' phases

12 SOME STUDENT RESPONSES TO DIARIES AND JOURNAL

12.1 Students can be unclear about what 'reflection' means

12.2 May have difficulty in making connections between experience, private and public theories

12.3 They may be uncertain about how their diaries are going to be 'read' and about 'audience'

12.4 They may be unsure about its purpose and value

12.5 They can have problems in moving between formal academic registers of writing and more personal, subjective registers

12.6 Reflection as inhibiter of action

12.7 They will vary in their responses, attitudes and commitment to journal keeping

12.8 Their 'products' will vary in the following ways

12.8.1 the extent of personal to professional material included

12.8.2 in the range of themes explored

12.8.3 in the balance between descriptive and analytic elements

12.8.4 in the degree to which observation and description are related to public theories

13 SOME TUTOR RESPONSES TO DIARIES AND DIARISTS

13.1 Responses to text

13.1.1 Looking for evidence of detailed description1

13.1.2 looking for evidence of contextual reflection2

13.1.3 looking for evidence of augmented reflection3

13.1.4 looking for evidence of connection between experience and public theories

13.1.5 evidence of connections between school observation and own, current experience of learning

13.1.6 evidence of capacity to offer alternative explanations for events and experiences

13.1.7 evidence of capacity to connect specific micro phenomena to macro-structural relationships

13.1.8 evidence of coherence, narrative unity and an emerging sense of professional-personal growth

13.1.9 evidence of desire to make reflection a permanent part of a professional life style

13.1.10 evidence in dialogical relationship to respond to alternative frames of knowledge

14 ISSUES

14.1 Structure or strait-jacket

There is a tension in teacher training institutions between providing a supportive structure for student diaries and notebooks and turning the structure into a strait jacket.

Students, given their work-loads and their anxieties will push for clearer prescriptions for content, approach, presentation, intentions, assessment, audience, purpose etc. These are reasonable demands but responses to such requests should be phrased to allow room for individual needs. Guidelines [written and oral] need to address through course evaluation the extent to which they are used in practice. Some balance is needed between the descriptive, reflective and analytic aspects of diaries and notebooks in relation to the other demands on students.

14.2 Time for de-briefing

In many cases the neglected aspect of pre-service teachers' diaries is the time and space for 'de-briefing'. Practical demands on tutors limit the time available for this vital aspect yet without an adequate opportunity for dialogue much of the potential value of student diaries will be lost.

14.3 Skills in de-briefing and 'reading' texts

A serious issue for staff development relates to the confidence of tutorial staff to deal with reflective-dialogical relationships. Not every tutor will feel at ease with having to negotiate with students how <u>their</u> private theories connect with their propositional knowledge.

14.4 Securing a place for reflective dialogue on training

courses

Given the pressures on training institutions to adopt an increasingly technicist view of teaching and teaching training in is more important than at any other time, to keep a space in the training programme for reflective practice. To maintain and extend the support from colleagues for the work education tutors will be called upon to demonstrate, beyond intuitive belief, that diary work and reflective space make difference to pre-service teachers' personal and professional development.

Notes

1. One of the aspects of diary work which differentiates students is in the area of selective, communicative and illuminative detail employed to fuel the sympathetic imagination of the reader.

2. To go beyond a description of events and happening and to place these in a socio-spatial context which provides an interpretation but which is in itself bounded by the context. Attempting to provide causal accounts.

3. Augmented reflection is when the interpretation of events and relationships draws upon experiences and private theories from beyond the context in which the described events took place. Such reflection may contain experiences from the students own life.

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